Jack Ruby's last step into ignom

By Hugh Aynesworth
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DALLAS

Jack Ruby, the chubby nightclub owner who forced his way into the history books with the stunning murder of Lee Harvey Oswald as millions watched on live television, always searched for class.

Never, ever, did he find it.

That today he would be thought of as a Mafia hit man, a key element in a vast conspiracy to kill the president, would likely have pleased him.

Ruby, who came to Dallas in 1947 from his hometown, Chicago, was never very successful. He owned, ran, leased and worked in a succession of tawdry Western bars, strip joints and greasy spoon restaurants.

He sold razor blades, picture postcards and Mexican bullfight paintings and once tried to market a new kind of skateboard. His sister, Eva, once joked that Jack had almost made it in Hula Hoops, but the craze faded before he could get rid of a carful he had bought wholesale.

Jack never made enough money to own more than two suits or a 5-year-old car. He never married and seldom dated. When he did, it was a Dallas secretary, Alice Nichols, with whom he shared a simple and, as he explained to his brothers, "a clean" life.

He and Alice would sometimes go to the movies, occasionally to dinner at one of his three favorite local restaurants.

"She was his girl," explained Stanley Kaufman of Dallas, one of his lawyers before he became famous, "and he did all he could to protect her from those he dealt with in his business; not that there was anything wrong with his business ... it was just the people."

Jack was everywhere those days in Dallas. If there was a major fire, he'd be there, looking like something out of a Dracula movie with his black clothes, black hat and his dark, unshaven face.

"If somebody climbed up on top of Neiman-Marcus to attempt suicide, I can guarantee you Jack would be down on the street, either selling some trinket or hustling an interview with some newsman," Tom Howard, another Ruby lawyer, once said.

"That is," Mr. Howard added, "if it was after noon. He usually didn't get rolling until then."

Since Ruby's clubs stayed open until the wee hours, and they generally were too sleazy for him to afford trustworthy help, he was often there until closing time.

"That's one reason why Jack didn't know too many daytime people," Mr. Kaufman said. "He worked a completely different shift."

No matter whether it was the Silver Slipper, where he once bit half a finger off a customer in a fight, or the Vegas and Carousel, which he ran at the time he killed Oswald, he seldom had any money in his bank account and almost always carried cash.

He once told a friend, Scotty Watters, that he carried cash because the "IRS is after me. If they can't find it, they can't get it."

When he died, in January 1967, he owed the IRS substantial amounts.

Some thought that since he was almost never seen with a woman, that he was gay.

"No way," said Carolyn Funston, who used to strip and also ran errands at the Carousel. "I know he came on to me several times and he really had a thing for Jada, who was his headliner for a while." Others who worked at that club and at Abe's Colony Club, two doors up Commerce Street, said Ruby never, ever dated the girls.

Those who portray Ruby as connected to the Mafia like to point out that he had connections in the Dallas Police Department, as evidenced by his roaming freely Friday night when police brought Oswald down for an appearance.

He told some out-of-town newsmen he represented an Israeli newspaper.

They, as did the world at large, wondered how he got down in the police basement just in time to kill Oswald.

That, if you read the evidence closely, is odd but explainable:

Ruby got a telephone call from "Little Lynn," one of his strippers who lived in Fort Worth, that Sunday morning, pleading for him to send her a $25 advance so she could pay her rent. He got his dog, all his cash and his .38-caliber Colt Cobra — which he lugged most all the time — and drove down to Western Union.

After calmly sending the money to Fort Worth, he stepped outside to walk back to his car and heard people shouting a block west, at the Main Street side of the police garage.

He rapidly walked the block and, as the Dallas cops moved the crowd back to allow the exit of a police cruiser, walked straight down the ramp — not mo
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